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KEEPING
YOU ■ POSTEDHeadline news for busy
church editors

September 1996

Here is the Good News of the United Church of Christ, especially edited for congregational publications, with topical news of the wider church, helpful hints to strengthen members' faith and pride in the denomination, and personal testimonies to stir the spirit. Each story is short and complete and can stand alone, ready to drop into the weekly bulletin or the monthly newsletter. The code at the end of some entries refers interested readers to a more comprehensive story in *United Church News*.

WHAT'S A FAMILY? – Commercially produced church directories are very popular, but before your congregation signs up for one, advises the Rev. Joanne Bogart, parish associate at First Congregational UCC, Boulder, Colo., quiz the company and have the minister describe how the church defines family. It could save money and avoid embarrassment.

Three generations in the same picture is an example. Some photographers will not include a grandparent, necessitating two pictures. On another occasion, a gay couple from an open and affirming church showed up for their portrait, one that the photographer was extremely reluctant to take. Vendors can't be expected to know the expectations of your local church unless told in advance.

DON'T ZAP THE ZIP-PLUS-4 – A reminder from the U.S. Post Office. As of July 1, 1996, all bulk mail labels must contain the new four-digit code which has been added to the present five-number zip code. For now, first-class mail will still be delivered with only the five-digit zip.

THE GRATITUDE OF THE NATION – Coming as it did on the heels of the TWA tragedy, the pipe bomb in Atlanta – which killed one and injured 111 – was devastating to the American psyche. But Olympics officials decided the Games should go on, and it remained for UCC minister and co-chair of the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games, the Rev. Andrew Young, to tap into the national feeling.

"We are here not to wallow in tragedy, but to celebrate a triumph, a triumph of human spirit," he told a crowd of 50,000 at the reopening of Centennial Olympic Park, a favorite meeting place for athletes and spectators alike in downtown Atlanta and site of the bombing. "So we say to those who suffered here, we assure your suffering was not in vain."

Young addressed a sorrowful but hopeful national audience and an international TV audience. "We are sure that the 21st century will remember the joy, the wonderful celebration, the vitality of the people of the earth gathered in this park, and that we will define the future. Not with bitterness," he said, "not alienation, but with joy, happiness."

– UCN, September 1996

AN "R" RATING FOR TV NEWS? – Bowing to public, religious and Congressional pressure, the television industry has finally agreed to consider controls on violent programming. A "V-chip" embedded in a TV set allows parents to block objectionable shows. A ratings system, similar to the one for motion pictures, guides viewers on the suitability of material by age group. The UCC's Office of Communication has long advocated both approaches.

Recently, two UCC leaders, the Rev. Jay Lintner, head of the Washington office of the Office for Church in Society, and the Rev. Arthur Lawrence Cribbs Jr., OC's executive director, were among those invited by the industry to discuss ratings and the V-chip as they would apply to violence in prime time entertainment shows. But Cribbs asked a question that stopped the conversation cold. What do we do about violence on local news, Cribbs wanted to know, pointing out that most local newscasts "have a crime blotter mentality" with their daily dose of murders, fires, robberies, accidents and other forms of violence, to the exclusion of reporting about civic affairs, politics and the economy.

The question forced sponsors of the conference to reconsider the pervasiveness of violence on television beyond entertainment programs, including the so-called "reality" news offerings like "Hard Copy" and "A Current Affair," and talk shows like "Sally Jessy Raphael." Cribbs thinks all of these should be rated.

OH NO! – Kids' interpretation of biblical scriptures: "Paul preached 'Holy Acrimony,' which is another name for marriage. He taught that Christians should have only one wife. This is called 'monotony.'"

STAR SIGHTINGS – Keeping You Posted likes to poke around for stories about UCC people with unusual talents and business ventures. Robert Lepley is pastor of Hollis Woods UCC, Queens, New York. He's also a professional musician and composer who has just released his first CD, "Ancient Tower" (EarthBeat Records, division of Time Warner), which in the words of the dust jacket is a "momentous soundscape of post-modern hymns."

Well, maybe. Lepley has set to music the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke, a popular turn-of-the-century German poet and philosopher, whom he discovered while in seminary. Some of the poetry is sung by a jazz vocal group, while other poems are read by actress Meryl Streep. Check your local music store.

CELEBRATING A RITE OF PASSAGE –

Few events loom as important to teenagers as getting a driver's license.

"For suburban kids, earning a license is one of the big milestones on the road to adulthood," says the Rev. John Flynn, minister of Christian education at Southbury (Conn.) UCC. So, to honor that rite of passage, the church holds a special service of celebration. "The 'Celebration for a New Driver' has quickly become an important tradition for our kids," he reports. New drivers are given a key chain with the words, "To believe is to care, to care is to do."

— Our thanks to *Connections*, publication of the UCC Stewardship Council

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TEMPTED? — "In the beginning," reads the advertising, "there was sex, violence, murder, jealousy, rage, seduction, greed, power trips and snakes. It made a Good Book. It makes a great television series."

UCC theologian Walter Brueggemann would probably agree. He's one of those featured in a new PBS Bill Moyers series, aptly called "Genesis, A Living Conversation."

Each program takes a single story from Genesis which is given a dramatic reading by a well known storyteller. Then the fun begins. Moyers throws together for each of the 10 programs an eclectic mixture of guests – theologians, authors, clergy, teachers, actors – who often clash over interpretations of the story. It's this wild and wooly free-for-all that gives "Genesis" its punch. Tempted? The series premiere is Oct. 16 at 8 p.m. (ET) and thereafter on Sundays, beginning Oct. 20 at 6 p.m. Check your local listings.

WITNESSING TO REPUBLICANS AND DEMOCRATS – Most delegates to the Republican National Convention in San Diego probably missed UCC minister the Rev. Jerry Stinson. This peace and justice advocate could generally be found across the street from the convention site in the so-called protest zone doing just that.

"We wanted to show the country that the Christian Coalition does not speak for all Christians," says Stinson, who is pastor at Pilgrim UCC, Carlsbad, Calif., and a member of the Interfaith Alliance Foundation, sponsor of the demonstrations, prayer vigils and worship services.

The Republican National Committee had fought the protest zones but lost in the courts. Stinson thinks the national media pay too much attention to the power of the Religious Right. In addition to the convention vigil, he also joined the Interfaith Coalition on Immigrants' Rights in a candlelight prayer vigil on both sides of the U.S./Mexican border. A similar witness was held at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago to remind delegates to hold fast on justice issues like affirmative action, immigration rights and welfare.

TEN YEARS WILL GET YOU A TV INTERVIEW – Most people are lucky to get a gold watch or pin after 25 years on the job. Janice Engsberg got a TV show after only 10 years. But then Engsberg is something of a celebrity.

A visiting professor of journalism and mass communication at Xiamen University on the southeast coast of China, Engsberg is in her 11th one-year assignment – something unheard of by Chinese standards, where the government rarely allows foreigners to work more than two years in the same place. So when the local TV station heard about it, the station sent a camera crew to interview Engsberg and follow her around her apartment, the classroom and the market to share with millions of viewers why this Missouri native was living and teaching in China. And the university turned out in force for a reception.

There are many foreigners in Xiamen, but this Chinese-speaking American has become better known than most because of the TV exposure, and strangers greet her on the street. Janice Engsberg is sponsored, in part, by the UCC/Disciples Common Global Ministry and the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries, working through the United Board for Christian Higher Education.